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Strategic Warning Staff

Washington, D.C. 20001

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20 October 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting National Intelligence Officer for Warning

SUBJECT : East European Leadership Statements as a Barometer
of Soviet Intentions in Poland

1. Recent warnings by Czech and East German leaders about the "antisocialist" forces at work in Poland may herald a Soviet-inspired campaign to discredit the Polish leadership and eventually to clear the way for massive intervention. But there is still no evidence that Moscow has determined that direct military intervention offers the only way out of the Polish dilemma. [redacted]

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2. In recent days, both East German party chief Honecker and Czech party chief Husak have delivered major addresses that included hostile references to the evolving Polish trade union movement. Honecker on 13 October was especially harsh on West Germany's alleged role in backing the movement; his newly toughened stance, conveyed also by the abrupt shift in currency regulations that will reduce travel from West to East Germany, suggests that the GDR is now willing to pay a high cost in its relations with West Germany and the West at large as part of an overall effort to retain full political and economic control at home while closing ranks with Moscow over Poland. Husak's statement was only the most prominent of several sour notes on Poland delivered by Czech leaders to a Central Committee meeting in Prague on 7-9 October. The Czech media have been quick to draw explicit analogies between events of 1968 and the present situation, as public assurances that Warsaw can count on the solidarity of Czechoslovakia in the struggle against those who would "wrench Poland away from the family of socialist countries" proliferate. [redacted]

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3. Such statements may constitute the opening of a propaganda campaign undertaken at Soviet behest that would erect the ideological framework for massive military intervention in Poland. Moscow may entertain the notion that giving the East Europeans the polemical lead while the USSR keeps to the political high road for as long as possible might reduce somewhat the political and diplomatic costs of a move into Poland. [redacted]

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4. A few key pieces of evidence are still lacking, however. Bulgaria, usually Moscow's most efficient propaganda partner, is yet to be heard from on the Polish question at a similarly authoritative level. Neither has Soviet media coverage zeroed in on the references to Poland in the Czech and East German statements; in fact, a reference by Honecker to the possibility that "we and our friends" will act to keep Poland bound to socialism was dropped by TASS, as it was also by the East German news agency. [redacted]

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5. In general, authoritative commentary on the Polish issue has been absent from the Soviet press recently; no systematically critical statements have appeared for more than two weeks. Though possibly a signal of genuine uncertainty about the outlook in Warsaw, this reticence may alternatively reflect a tactical appreciation that high-profile condemnations from Moscow only unify the Polish opposition and excite comment abroad while actually hampering the regime's effort to regain control of the situation. [REDACTED]

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6. The East Europeans may have reasons of their own for starting to come down hard on the Poles at this time. The East Germans have shown particular concern over any spread of labor troubles into their own fragile economy, with last month's unsuccessful strike against the East German-owned railway system in West Berlin as an added reminder of the ghosts of 1953. The current East German effort to curb trade with the West appears meant specifically to avert what is seen as the Polish trap--excessive foreign indebtedness sapping the economy and inviting foreign political influence. Czech anxieties as always focus on the possibility that a major precedent for free expression will be established in a neighboring socialist state, possibly setting off a chain reaction that could bring fresh instability to Czechoslovakia. In this context, statements by East European leaders could be intended mainly to stiffen Warsaw's resistance to uncontrolled change, thus reducing the pressure in other potentially vulnerable areas. [REDACTED]

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7. Whatever the actual purpose of the East European statements, sudden changes in Poland could goad the Soviets to drastic action with a minimum of visible deliberation. If the Polish labor movement were to seek a new nationwide confrontation and Moscow were to conclude--possibly in advance--that Kania's response is inadequate or irrelevant, the scene would be set for a swift invasion, with little ideological ritual beyond that already provided by the Czechs and East Germans. There is still little indication, however, that the USSR has yet determined that there is no hope of a political solution in Poland. [REDACTED]

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8. In the extreme case, which would suggest that the Soviets have already orchestrated a complete symphony of fraternal condemnation of Poland prior to an invasion, these statements by East European leaders would be only the overture. The weeks to come would presumably bring a succession of high-level consultations and communiques among Warsaw Pact leaders, with references to the threat to Poland's socialist achievements becoming progressively more explicit. It would mark a particularly important turning point if Hungarian leaders were to join the chorus in ominous tones. The vital political indicator of Soviet intentions toward Poland remains the statements of Soviet leaders themselves, though such plain signals might follow rather than precede any actual decision to carry through with plans to intervene. [REDACTED]

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9. This memorandum may only be distributed to recipients of the National Intelligence Daily. [REDACTED]

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